



# Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

## Sujato Bhikkhu - Week 2

### The Way to the Beyond:

### A Study of the Pārāyanavagga

Recorded on July 27, 2022

So greetings everybody, I hope you're all well. And good to see you back again. So you might be might notice that my voice is a bit kind of gravelly, and I've had a bit of cold the last few days. So if you feel if you find that it's too rough for you, then just close your eyes and imagine that the dhamma talks been given by Tom Waits and then everything will be better.

Okay, so we're here for the second of our installments on the Pārāyanavagga of the Sutta Nipata. I am speaking to you, as usual from a place in Harris Park, which is on the unseeded Land of the barrow, medical people of the direct nation. And so pay respects and honor to their elders past, present and emerging. So I hope that you've all had a great week, this past week. And that life and everything like that is treating you as well as could be expected.

All right, so let's start with a brief recap from last week. So we began with the introduction to the Pārāyanavagga, which is the fifth chapter of the Sutta Nipata, which is one of the books of the Khuddakanikāya of the Sutta Tipitaka. So the basket of discourses, the minor collection, and the anthology of discourses Sutta Nipata. Pārāyanavagga, which means the Way to the Beyond.

And so last week, we looked at the first chapter, which is a narrative introduction. And I talked about the fact that this narrative introduction is it's a bit lowbrow if you compared it to the bulk of the text. And while it is clear that this is substantially later addition to the text, I also argued that it has a narrative purpose, particularly that it situates the collection as a whole as a conversion narrative. So it's telling us something about how the early Buddhist communities spoke to people who were around them in ancient India at that time, especially as they're spreading to new areas.

Now, even though that first section is linguistically, narratively, doctrinally quite distinct from what we find in the central portion of the Pārāyanavagga. There's still a many connections between the two. And I'll point some of those out as we go today.

So today, we will begin with the 16 questions, or rather 16 sets of questions which are asked by various of the Brahman students of Bāvāri when they came to see the Buddha. So after their long journey,

finally they came and they had the chance to ask the questions. Now, a number of these passages that we're looking at are actually quoted elsewhere in the suttas. So this gives us a chance to do a bit of intra-text duality, checking how the same text might be used in different places. And in fact, it's worth bearing in mind that these particular verses, even if we just considered within the Pali canon, are used and quoted in a variety of contexts. The Sutta Nipata of which is the primary context, then there are these occasional cases where they're quoted in the four nikāyas, and also quoted in the Niddesa, which is the commentary, the canonical commentary on the on this chapter. And also we find a number of them are quoted in the Nettipakaraṇa as well, which is a kind of a guidebook to interpretation of the suttas. It's also found in the conduct any kind. So these were dealt with and explained and interpreted from a variety of perspectives from the earliest time.

All right. And as always, since we have a relatively short Oh, hang on. Oh, interesting. So Oh, sorry. I just noticed message there by Susan. So Susan Pembroke has given announcement of a beginner's Pāli class on Zoom that's being offered there, so that's really interesting. Thanks for that. So please do join up anyone who's interested to learn some Pāli. I might pass that on to a few of my friends actually.

Okay. Let's have a look at the first set of questions from Ajita. And he was the first of the Brahmins who spoke to the Buddha. And the Buddha invited him to ask whatever he wanted. And Ajita's questions, in some ways, probably the most famous of the sets of questions, and which give a rather succinct overview of the scope of the questions that have been asked by these Brahmins. Let's have a look at Ajita questions.

“By what is the world shrouded?” said Venerable Ajita. “Why does it not shine? Tell me, what is its tar pit? What is its greatest fear?” “The world is shrouded in ignorance.” replied the Buddha. “Avarice and negligence make it not shine. Prayer is its tar pit. Suffering is its greatest fear.” “The streams flow everywhere,” said Venerable Ajita. “What is there to block them? And tell me the restraint of streams—by what are they locked out?” “The streams in the world,” replied the Buddha, “are blocked by mindfulness. I tell you the restraint of streams— they are locked out by wisdom.” “That wisdom and mindfulness,” said Venerable Ajita, “and that which is name and form, good sir; when questioned, please tell me of this: where does this all cease?” “This question which you have asked, I shall answer you, Ajita. Where name and form cease with nothing left over— with the cessation of consciousness, that's where they cease.” “There are those who have assessed the teaching, and many kinds of trainees here. Tell me about their behavior, good sir, when asked, for you are alert.” “Not greedy for sensual pleasures, their mind would be unclouded. Skilled in all things, a mendicant would wander mindful.”

Okay, very good. So here in these questions of Ajita, we have an extremely succinct, and very powerful set of questions. The first set of questions he's asking, what is the problem? Why are things like they are? Second question is asking, what can we do about it? So the first one is about dukkha. Second one is how do you practice? What do you do? And then the third question is asking about the goal of practice. And so what actually happens? Do we just keep practicing forever? Does the roads go on forever? Or is there an end to these things? And then finally, he asked a question about those who have assessed the teaching, and many kinds of trainees. In other words, those who are arhants is the first category, those who have assessed the teaching and those who are still on the path and asked about their practice. So how do those people live, who have fully or partially attained the goal? So even

within these just few verses, there's a very, very broad and very succinct and very powerful expression of the whole scope of the Buddha's teaching.

There are a number of interesting little linguistic details around I won't dwell on them for too long. But worth noticing. First one is what is the word shrouded, nivuto. Now this is actually the past participle, the same word that we're familiar with, with nīvaraṇa as in the hindrances, so this is literally by what is the word hindered, we might translate that. But the basic meaning of nīvaraṇa is to shroud or enclose or to darker. And in the Rigveda, the Vritra, the cosmic serpent or the dragon that enshrouds the world. This is the word for the dragon that enshrouds the world. And so there's almost this word as idea that the it's what covers things up. It's obscure wisdom, it brings darkness.

Now the idea of the tar pit, if you're thinking of Brer Rabbit falling into the tar pit, then good you're supposed to be thinking of Brer Rabbit falling into the topic. There is a story in the, I think it's in the Satipatthana Sutta that talks about a monkey that gets its hands and feet and even its face stuck in the tar, and the word for tar in that case is "lepana", the same word we find here "ābhilepana" or "lepana". So it could have a variety of senses, but generally it means some kind of sticky substance. So it's something that you get stuck in. Sometimes a tar pit.

Now, one of the most interesting lines here that the Buddha is saying is when he says that prayer is its tar pit. Now, notice that again, as so often the Buddha's sort of psychological strategy, when he begins with the word world is shrouded in ignorance. Remember that this actually calls back to the original narrative, because if you recall, the conflict there was that the teacher Bāvari was afraid that his head was going to split into seven pieces. And Buddha's answer was that the head is ignorance. And it's knowledge, which is that which splits the head into pieces. So by calling back and using the the idea of avijjā is making that connection there. Avarice and negligence make it not shine. So far by talking about avarice and negligence, the Buddha is in a way establishing that common ground. You know, the brahman who's come to see him is somebody who's interested in knowledge, interested in overcoming ignorance, and so on. And so the Buddha starts by, finding some common ground. And then he says, "but prayer is the tar pit". Now, the word I've translated as prayer here is "jappā". And jappā basically means like, incanting the Vedic mantras. And so this might be done as a religious service as a sacrifice. It might be done as a curse, as we saw in the opening narrative. It might be done as a simply way of recollecting the Vedas and so on. But this is a very kind of common idea, jappā. But jappā has a slight ambiguity in its form, because it also means to wish for, to desire for something. And so in that sense, it neatly encompasses the English word prayer, to pray is to repeat the sacred words. But to pray is also to ask for something, to beg for something, to wish for something. And so this is really precisely what the Buddha is talking about here when he's replying to Ajita. You think that when you're reciting your sacred scriptures, that you will get what you want. That this will help you to focus your mind and your aspiration, and that you will realize that what you want, but actually, this is what you're stuck on. This is what is holding you back. So it really kind of dense line there. And with quite powerful implications, you can imagine that the 16 Brahmins listening to this would have been challenged by this.

Anyway. Streams are flowing everywhere, blocked by mindfulness, "Sati tesam nivāraṇam". I tell you the restraint of streams, they are locked out by wisdom. So the idea here, it's a little bit difficult to pass this verse out in the Pāli. But the basic idea is that mindfulness keeps the streams of desire in the world checked, but they are not fully locked out or fully blocked. But until wisdom comes into play, as well.

"That wisdom and mindfulness and that which is name and form and question tell me of this, where does this whole sit?" This is an interesting question, because he's asking about like, even these things which we regard as being good: wisdom, mindfulness. I mean, how could you not want more of these things? And yet, even these things, do they come to an end? And what about name and form, nama rupa. Again an Upanishadic term, referring to nama being literally name or the conceptual side of life, the concepts the mentality. Rupa being the physical dimension things which are perceived as having physical properties.

This question which you have asked, I shall answer you is the cessation of consciousness. "Viññāṇassa nirodhena." And again in this directly contradicting the teachings of Arjuna valia in the Upanishads Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, who saw the Vijñāna as the higher self, the purpose which was the purpose the ultimate purpose of practice. So the Buddha is making a direct contradiction with Upanishadic doctrine. So in Upanishadic doctrine, the basic idea is that this world of manifestations that we live in is like all of the rivers, which each have their individual names and their individual forms. But when all of those rivers flow down, they merge and meld into the great ocean. And that great ocean is the infinite mass of Vijñāna, of consciousness. And that is your true self. So this is the Upanishadic doctrine. Now, interestingly enough, if you know a little bit about science and ecology and so on, then you know, well, that's actually not really how the world works, there isn't a kind of infinite ocean that just somehow receives the water. But actually, it's a cycle and the ocean evaporates becomes rain rains on the lands, and then the water flows down back into the ocean. And it's a cycle where all of these things are mutually dependent on each other. And that, in fact, is the Buddha's teachings. So the Buddhist teachings is a naturalistic teaching, it talks about cycles and patterns. Talks about dependency. It talks about how things relate to each other. So it doesn't talk about this idea that there's some kind of absolute consciousness that exists outside of reality, outside of conventional reality, I should say.

Now, at the last one, those who have assessed the teaching, so Ajita is just sort of throwing this term here, "saṅkhātadhammā". Saṅkhāta is an important term. We find this a number of a number of times it as you can see from the look up there. Agreed on reckoned. So called named okay. This doesn't mean a kind of been at the end. So our little Pāli compound breaker upper, it's not quite working correctly here, it should be "saṅkhātadhammāse", but anyway, doesn't get it always writes about maybe a 85% correct. Anyway, the first word is right sankhāra agreed on reckoned so called or named. So one of the basic ideas of sankhāra sutta, or sankhāra, is the saṅkhātad is like the reckoning or the calculation of things. So think about say business, right? So keeping your books in business, so you know exactly what is there, how many such and such item, how much it costs, and all of those things. And if you look at Indian philosophies, they're actually very businesslike a lot of the time, you know, they are very interested in categorizing things. Making sure everything's placed on the shelf in the right spot. And so this idea that somehow you can survey the world, and record everything and categorize everything and what where everything is and how it fits into place. And so this is what that sense of saṅkhā is. So saṅkhā is, saṅkhāta is having accessed it or having recommend the teaching. So then how do they behave, not greedy for sensual pleasures in mind would be unclouded. Skilled in all things, a mendicant would wonder mindful. "Sato bhikkhu paribbajeti".

Now this particular verse, this last verse is also found in another sutta, which I will just briefly share with you. And that is the Bhūtasutta. So, the Buddha said to Sāriputta, "this was said in 'The Way to the Beyond', in 'The Questions of Ajita'". So there's plenty places in the suttas where it will just like, quote, align or recall a verse or a passage or something like that. But in these cases, one of the reasons why

it's so interesting with the Pārāyanavagga and also the Aṭṭhakavagga, is that they're actually quoted and referred to by name. So this was set in the Way to the Beyond in the questions of Ajita. "There were those who have assessed the teaching and many kinds of trainees here, tell me about their behavior good sir, when asked, for you are alert. How should we see the detailed meaning of this brief statement? When he said this, Sāriputta kept silent." Okay, very dramatic. Alright. Very dramatic moment here. Yeah, you can imagine the Buddha's there. Sāriputta, the greatest disciple, the most accomplished in wisdom. The Buddha's asking him for the meaning of that particular verse and he just sits there and says nothing. Very dramatic little moment here. Second time, the third time. And then the Buddha said, Sāriputta, do you see that this has come to be "Bhūtamidanti, sāriputta, passasīti". So, this has come to be when he hears this, Bhūtamidan, the idea of Buddha contains the idea of something which has been produced or generated or conditioned. So, when Sāriputta heard this, then it seems that he recognized the framework in which the Buddha was asking the question. So, it's interesting that the Sāriputta could have answered by simply quoting from the original passage, or paraphrasing the original passage, whereas, in fact, the answer he gives here is not very similar to the answer that the Buddha gives in the Ajitamāṇa itself. But the Buddha was asking for a particular framing of it here. And it wasn't until he knew what framing the Buddha wanted, that he was able to answer. So one who sees with right wisdom that this has come to be, seeing this on his practicing for delusion, disillusionment, and so on. One who's truly sees this is practicing for disillusionment. So what the basic point here is, one is practicing what you've seen, what has come to be. In other words, you've seen how things are conditioned, how things are produced, or in other words, you've seen dependent origination. In this way, you're a trainee, that is to say you're a stream enterer, once returner, a non-returner. And what is one who is assessed the teaching one truly sees. So seeing that one is freed but not grasping. Okay, so one is free, but one practicing to be free just by not grasping is a trainee. One who has been freed, is one who has assessed the teaching. In other words, an arahant. And so this is the explanation that Sāriputta give here.

So one of the things about that which is interesting is that, it shows us that, that in the earliest time in the sangha, that we weren't just getting, like one interpretation of everything. Right? It's an open question. It could have been answered in many ways. Of course, that doesn't mean that it could be answered in any way. Right? But it does mean that there was a creativity and a contextual awareness in how people were approaching these things. All right. So this is the Ajitamāṇavapucchā.

Let's move ahead to the next one, and I will share my screen again. Again, because we have a relatively short session, we don't really have time for a question session. But please do feel free to pop any questions into the chat, I am keeping an eye on that.

Okay Tissametteyya. So venerable Tissametteyya appears here. The metteyya here is not there's no relation to Metteyya, otherwise known as Maitreya, the Buddha in the future. Although, in the Buddhist tradition, there were a variety of stories that sort of connected the two and so on. But in the sutta itself, there's no such connection.

Tissametteyya begins with a very powerful question, who is content here in the world? "Kodha santusito loke". I was reading that this morning. It really struck me. Who was content? Like, we always want something don't we? Always want something. And even when we come to a spiritual life, it seems that we're still driven by desire, by ego. And yet to find someone who is truly content. Such a powerful thing. "Who has no disturbances, 'iñjitā'." Perturbations, perhaps. "Who having known both ends is not stuck

in the middle. 'Ko ubhantamabhiññāya, Majjhe mantā na lippati.' Who do they say is a great man? Who here has escaped the seamstress?" Very terse questions. And the Buddha gives equally terse answers here. "Leading the spiritual life among sensual pleasures, rid of craving, ever mindful; a mendicant who, after assessing, is quenched: that's who has no disturbances." So it seems that the first part of that verse probably refers to contentment, it's not entirely clear exactly how they are related. But in any case, one who is quenched is one who has no iñjitā. So that idea of iñjitā is one that we will come back to in subsequent questions. "That sage, having known both ends, is not stuck in the middle. He is a great man, I declare, he has escaped the seamstress here." "So idha sibbinimaccagā".

So the Buddha doesn't give too much detail in the answer there, which leaves that up to a bit of interpretation. And in fact, this is another sutta where we find that interpretation was discussed in the suttas let's have a look at how that happened. (AN 6.61)

So the Buddha's in Benares, and after the meal, several senior mendicant sat together in the pavilion and this discussion came up among them. ""Reverends, this was said by the Buddha in 'The Way to the Beyond', in 'The Questions of Metteyya': 'The sage has known both ends, and is not stuck in the middle. He is a great man, I declare, he has escaped the seamstress here.' But what is one end? What's the second end? What's the middle? And who is the seamstress?" All good questions. So one of them says contact is one end. The origin of contact is the second end. The cessation of contact is the middle, and craving is the seamstress, for craving weaves one to being reborn in one state of existence or another "taṇhā hi naṃ sibbati tassa tasseva bhavassa abhinibbattiyā." Interesting, right, I find that it's a really, really powerful simile, that idea of the seamstress. Reminds me as a fan of mythology, it reminds me of a Penelope sitting weaving in the castle of Odysseus as he was wandering around the world. And that kind of idea of kind of binding and tying together of the world. So kind of potent set of imagery.

And then a variety of other questions. The past is one end, the future is the second end, the present is the middle and craving is the seamstress. Okay? Doesn't seem like a bad explanation as well, right? Past, so is sort of letting go the past or future or letting go, "majjhe mantā na lippati", right? So remember, not even getting stuck in the middle. Seems reasonable. Now another one said pleasant feeling is one end, painful feeling is the second end, neutral feeling is the middle, and craving is the seamstress. Also, okay, seems reasonable, right? Sometimes it's like that you hear a bunch of different explanations, they all seem to make sense. Another one says name is one end, form is the second end, consciousness is the middle, and craving is the seamstress. And other one said the six interior sense fields are one end, the six exterior sense fields are the second end, consciousnesses the middle, craving is the seamstress. Identity is one end, the origin of identity is the second end, the cessation of identity is the middle, craving is the seamstress, Not sure about that one. Okay. I mean, I'll allow it but the Buddha's saying, don't be attached to the middle and says it's the cessation of identity is the middle, I don't know. Sounds a bit sus. But anyway, we'll leave it at that.

So one of the mendicants said to the senior mendicants. "Each of us has spoken from the heart. Come, reverends, let's go to the Buddha, and inform him about this. As he answers, so we'll remember it. Yes, reverend." So notice that they will have these different interpretations. But, and I know this might come as a shock to you, but they don't get angry and upset with each other because they have a different opinion. I know amazing, right? It's almost as if they were kind of mature adults who understood that other people can have different opinions and that was kind of okay.

So they went to the Buddha and asked him who has spoken well. “Kassa nu kho, bhante, subhāsitan” ti? "Mendicants, you've all spoken well in a way." Ah, okay. So they've all given answers, which are in line with dhamma. And they've all given answers, which makes sense in terms of the context.

“However, this is what I was referring to in ‘The Way to the Beyond’, in ‘The Questions of Metteyya’ when I said: ‘The sage has known both ends, and is not stuck in the middle. He is a great man, I declare, he has escaped the seamstress here.’ Listen and pay close attention, I will speak.” "The Buddha said this: “Contact, mendicants, is one end. The origin of contact is the second end. The cessation of contact is the middle. And craving is the seamstress, for craving weaves one to being reborn in one state of existence or another. That’s how a mendicant directly knows what should be directly known and completely understands what should be completely understood. Knowing and understanding thus they make an end of suffering in this very life.”

So the first answer was right. They're all pretty good. But one answer was right. You got to imagine that the monk who was like the first answer was feeling pretty pleased with themselves at that moment. But, you know, and again, to me this is really interesting, because you see something of the life of these teachings within the community. Something people would discuss. They would have interpretations. There would be back and forth. And so these teachings are never something, they're not they're not just a dead letter. But there's something which was alive and engaged with in the community itself. And that, to me is one of the really kind of powerful things about the suttas. They're not just sort of dead textbooks, but they're regarded with a sense of urgency. I mean, we've already seen how urgently the 16 Brahmins really wanted to know and the effort they put into come see the Buddha.

All right, let us continue. The seamstress. Yeah, so Debbie, just mentioned that she was interested in the idea of a stream here. So this was the streams that are flowing everywhere. So this is not the stream as in stream entry. But there the stream is used as a synonym for the senses and the stream of activity that we're getting through the senses. Ann mentions, so each stitches is a life? I don't know if he just stitches a life, but it's more like there's this idea in the suttas, you have idea of bhavanetti. Bhava is a life and a netti is like a cord, or something that binds, you know, so you have this almost like a way that things are being woven and bound together, like a create a tapestry that tells a story. It's very, it's really evocative set of imagery. Anyway, let's move on.

Next one. So the Puṇṇaka, these questions are also quoted elsewhere in that in the nikāyas. We'll briefly check those as well. “To the imperturbable, the seer of the root,” said Venerable Puṇṇaka, “I have come in need with a question. Atthi pañhena āgamaṃ. On what grounds have hermits and men, aristocrats and brahmins here in the world performed so many different sacrifices to the gods? I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this.” brūhi me “Whatever hermits and men,” replied the Buddha, “aristocrats and brahmins here in the world have performed so many different sacrifices to the gods: all performed sacrifices bound to old age, hoping for some state of existence.” So the sacrifice. Such an important part of, not just Brahmanical religion, but religion all around the world. It's so strange. The sacrifice is one of the strangest things in all of human culture. And we get so used to the idea that it's normal, that you forget that it's deeply weird. Remember that in the opening narrative, that Bāvari had just performed the sacrifice. So again, this is a kind of a challenging answer that the Buddha is giving here. So he's even Bāvari, even their own teacher was attached or concerned with old age. And that's why he did this.

“As to those hermits and men, and aristocrats and brahmins here in the world who have performed so many different sacrifices to the gods: being diligent in the methods of sacrifice, have they crossed over rebirth and old age, good sir? I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this.” Okay, so if you look in the Brahmanical scriptures, they have a lot of detail about exactly the right way to do sacrifices. This is what he's meaning when he's talking about being diligent in the methods of sacrifice.

The Buddha again, giving a fairly uncompromising answer, “Hoping, invoking, praying, and worshiping, they pray for pleasure derived from profit. Devoted to sacrifice, besotted by rebirth, they've not crossed over rebirth and old age, I declare.” Okay, so that's a hard one to hear. It's a hard one to hear. Hoping, Āsīsanti right? I gave a whole talk last Friday about hoping and about how we should all lose hope. And some people really didn't like it. I can't imagine why. Anyway. And so this idea that prayer and these religious activities are bound up with wanting to get something. And here you find perhaps the earliest, or one of the earliest ideas, of expressions of the idea that you can only make money if you've got money. “And so they're saying you're praying for pleasure derived from profit, paṭicca lābhaṃ.” So the point here is that only those who are wealthy can perform sacrifices. Only if you've got stuff, can you just throw it away. And that's a really interesting perspective and a very kind of true perspective. That one of the sociological roles of sacrifice has always been to burn off excess wealth, and to distribute wealth with others. And so, only if you have things can you get things. So this whole round of sacrifice, even though it seems that sacrifices about giving things up. Actually, the whole thing is bound up with this cycle of acquisition and profiting.

“If those devoted to sacrifice have not, by sacrificing, crossed over rebirth and old age, then who exactly in the world of gods and humans has crossed over rebirth and old age, good sir? I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this.” “Having assessed the world high and low,” this word Saṅkhāya, which we're finding commonly used in these passages. “There is nothing in the world that disturbs them.” “Yassiñjitaṃ natthi kuhiñci loke.” “Peaceful, unclouded, untroubled, with no need for hope—they've crossed over rebirth and old age, I declare.” “Atāri so jātijaranti brūmī”.

So again, the word I'm translating here as hope is “āsā”, which is probably the closest Pāli word here. There's no word that's really exactly the same as the English word for hope, but I suppose probably the closest.

So and again, the idea here is that the spiritual practice that we do is based on who we are now, and what we can realize and what we can become now. And so in Buddhist idea, we're not doing something because we have hope of a better world in the future. But because we have knowledge that if we do the right thing now, that we create a better world right now.

So when I'm saying that we shouldn't be losing hope, I'm not saying that we should embrace despair, although despair isn't such a bogeyman, you know. Just a little bit of despair as okay. So it's like a touch you know, not too much. And it keeps things spicy.

Anyway, so this sutta again, is referred to in the sutras, this is in Aṅguttaranikāya 3.32. But in this case, I won't read 3.32. Even though it's actually really interesting sutta. I'll just paste it in the chat for you. But otherwise, we won't get through enough suttas. It's a really interesting suttam but I'd like to move ahead. Let's look at the next one. Okay, I'm going to skip over the next one, and I'm going to go straight to 5.6, the Questions of Dhotaka. Again, I'm concerned we're running out of time.

"I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this. I long for your voice, great hermit. After hearing your message, I shall train myself for quenching." "Well then, be keen, alert," replied the Buddha, "and mindful right here. After hearing this message, go on and train yourself for quenching." "I see in the world of gods and humans a brahmin travelling with nothing. Therefore I bow to you, all-seer: release me, Sakyan, from my doubts."

Notice that in this description of this Brahman traveling with nothing as very similar to the description of Bāvari in the opening narrative where he was also said to Brahman with nothing; who was embarking on a journey. Very powerful verse response by the Buddha here. "I am not able to release anyone in the world who has doubts, Dhotaka. But when you understand the best of teachings, you shall cross this flood." So this idea that the Buddha said, he cannot liberate anybody, cannot get them enlightened, but he can only show them the path. And here that's obviously a very famous kind of idea we find a lot in modern Buddhism. Often quoted idea. And this is one of the main sources for that idea.

Again, it's a radical notion, and it's a radical gesture of humility. To say it's not up to him, it's not up to the Buddha to do this. It's up to you to practice. Then you shall cross this flood.

"Teach me, brahmin, out of compassion, the principle of seclusion so that I may understand. I wish to practice right here, peaceful, independent, as unimpeded as space." Yathāhaṃ ākāsova abyāpajjamāno.

"I shall extol that peace for you," replied the Buddha, "that is apparent in the present, not relying on tradition. Diṭṭhe dhamme anītihaṃ. Having understood it, one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world." "And I rejoice, great hermit, in that supreme peace, having understood which, one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world." "Once you have understood that everything," replied the Buddha, "you are aware of in the world— above, below, all round, between— is a snare, don't crave for life after life." Etaṃ viditvā saṅgoti loke.

Okay, so I will leave Dhotaka's questions for now. So we'll come to Upasiva's question. This is more famous set of questions. And I'll dwell on this a little bit longer.

"Alone and independent, O Sakyan, I am not able to cross the great flood." So you can see how this one's almost like drawing on the narrative from the previous one. The Buddha said, Well, I can't actually, I'm not able to bring you across myself. You have to do it. You have to do the work. And here Upasiva is saying, but I can't do it alone. You expect me to cross this great flood? "Tell me a support, All-seer, depending on which I may cross this flood." Tell me a support. There must be something I can use that's going to help me. "Ārammaṇaṃ brūhi. "Mindfully contemplating nothingness," replied the Buddha, depending on the perception 'there is nothing', cross the flood. Giving up sensual pleasures, refraining from chatter, watch day and night for the ending of craving." Ākiñcaññaṃ pekkhamāno satimā. Natthīti nissāya tarassu oghaṃ. So here, the Buddha is directly teaching the dimension of nothingness. And so many of you probably familiar in Buddhism we have the eightfold path, the aspect of the eightfold path, right Samadhi, the right Samadhi is usually defined as the four jhānas. And in addition to the four ... I hesitate to say ordinary, but the four standard jhānas ... we have the four formless attainments, which are sort of consequent to that. Infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness and neither perception nor non perception.

Now, when the Buddha had practiced with his former teachers, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Rāmaputta, he famously developed the third of those, the base of nothingness with Alara Kalama and the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception with Uddaka Rāmaputta. And so there seems to be with these Brahmins, this idea of nothingness. Is a kind of recurring theme. And here, it's you know, it's quite explicit that this is what the Buddha is talking about. And so it seems that these are sort of a circle of Brahmins or a school of Brahmins who were perhaps affiliated with Alara Kalama. Or at the very least, were practicing in a similar way. And who were used to practicing this particular state. Remember again in the introduction, it said that all of these Brahmins were experienced meditators.

So depending on the perception there is nothing crossed the flood. So again, the Buddha doesn't want to, don't want to get them to throw out the things that are valuable from their tradition, they've already been doing this very powerful meditation. So he wants them to continue that. Giving up sensual pleasures, refraining from chatter, watch day and night for the ending of craving.

So Upasiva goes on to ask some very interesting questions. So one is free of sensual desire, depending on nothingness. All else left behind, *hitvā maññaṃ*; "Freed in the ultimate liberation of perception: would they remain there without travelling on?" So his use of language here is very precise. So that the dimension of nothingness is the ultimate liberation of perception. Why? Because the next stage is neither perception nor non-perception. So nothingness is the highest liberation of perception. It's a very subtle point, but he's using language in a very precise way here, "Tiṭṭhe nu so tattha anānuyāyī." "Would they remain there without traveling on?" Now, the exact interpretation of this is not entirely obvious. And you could read it a number of ways. But I think what he's referring to here is the non return. It says "*Sabbesu kāmesu yo vītarāgo*". So he's got rid of any attachment or desire to sensual pleasures. So this describe well describes the non-returner, who's practicing that dimension of nothingness, Then they get reborn in that realm, would they remain there without traveling on? In other words, would they go to that realm? Would they then get reborn somewhere else after that? What happens? What happens to them?

But again, the Buddha's answers is quite interesting. The Buddha said, one free of sensual desire, depending on nothingness or left behind, freed in the ultimate liberation of perception, they would remain there without traveling on. "Tiṭṭheyya so tattha". If they were to remain there without traveling on even for many years, all-seerer. Right. So traditionally, it says that rebirthing such round will last for 60,000 eons. So when it says for many years, it's not kidding. "even for many years, and, growing cool right there, were freed, would the consciousness of such a one pass away?" So here, again, we're talking about these kinds of very, very exalted states and ideas. And yet Upasiva keeps on pushing, keeps on asking. So if you are a non-returner, you get reborn in that realm of nothingness, and then grow cool, in other words, become an arahant in that realm, with the consciousness of such a one pass away *Cavetha viññāṇaṃ*.

"As a flame tossed by a gust of wind," replied the Buddha, "comes to an end and no longer counts; so too, a sage freed from mental phenomena comes to an end and no longer counts."

And again, very evocative imagery, very powerful memorable imagery here. Notice again the use of the word *saṅkhaṃ*, as in to reckon, or to count, or to measure, or to add up something. So, they come to an end, *Atthaṃ paleti*. The freed from mental phenomena, again, the use of language is very precise here.

Nāmakāyā is a term for the cluster or complex of mental qualities. Now remember that this is talking about a person who has been reborn in that realm of formlessness where physical properties have already been left behind. So they only have that nāmakāyā to be freed from.

Still, Upasiva is not satisfied. I got to admit I like Upasiva. Someone who can start where he started and then just keep on pushing for questions. This is how you get the really good stuff. "One who has come to an end—do they not exist? Atthaṅgato so uda vā so natthi, Udāhu ve sassatiyā arogo." "Or are they eternally well?" So that would be the normal idea in the Brahmanical circles, that they get reborn in that realm and they stay there for eternity. "Please, sage, answer me clearly, for truly you understand this matter." And the Buddha gives a very enigmatic answer, "One who's come to an end cannot be measured," replied the Buddha. "They have nothing by which one might describe them. When all things have been eradicated, eradicated, too, are all ways of speech." Hmm, One who's come to an end cannot be measured. "Atthaṅgatassa na pamāṇamatthi." Literally, if you translate this literally, overly literally, it'd be something like, for one who's come to an end, there is no measure that by which one might describe them does not exist for them.

So they have escaped concepts, and the words to describe that are not found. So the idea here is that we describe things by the features or the particulars of those properties, which they have, but somebody who's in that state, there is nothing by which one might describe them. Ending with a slightly Wittgensteinian moment there.

So here are some of the questions in the Pārāyanavagga. And I'll just check a couple of the things you've said in the comments here before we wrap up. "Years ago a Buddhist I knew said that "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" could be thought of as a Buddhist idea. I told this to someone (a teacher) who didn't like it." It's interesting, I do find it interesting, because hope is an idea, it's a Christian idea of faith, hope and charity, and outlook. The fact that it's the Christian idea doesn't mean there's anything wrong with it. But it's interesting that it really isn't in Buddhism. And again, it's not just like there is this thing that isn't there. But the Buddha talked about things in quite a different way. It's not like there's something lacking from Buddhism. But the way the Buddha approached things, and we've seen this even in these questions. "Dhamme." What is there that is apparent in this very life? Something that I don't have to rely on tradition. I don't have to long for something. I don't have to produce something in the future. And so this idea, to me, this is much more powerful. And I do believe. Because I hear this a lot, especially when it comes to climate change. People say we have to have hope, we have to have hope. And always seems a bit desperate to me. It seems a bit fearful to me. And so I'm always like, well, I don't know, I gave up hope years ago. I'm doing all right. Okay. Not great, you know. Have good days and bad days, but it's okay. And you don't get so afraid of it. Hope's just a feeling. It's just an emotion. It's just an idea. It's okay. Get up in the morning, what are you going to do? You're still going to live a good life? That's the important thing. How are we going to live our life today? I don't know what's going to happen. Maybe it's something good will happen.

Anyway. Last question here from Julian. "Is the count here active ('one who counts'), passive ('one who is counted') or it plays on both senses?" It's interesting, it seems to sort of play on both those senses, because certainly it's somebody who has counted, has reckoned, right? So somebody who has understood fully and assessed what's happening. But also is the idea that once you've done that, that you step out of that realm of reckoning, so that you can yourself no longer be counted. It's interesting. I

mean, obviously, we could go a lot more detail into the specific nuances of that. And I'm just wanting to sort of draw attention to the prominent role that concept of saṅkhā plays within these texts.

So I think we've reached pretty much the end again today. It's been great, sharing some time with you to talk about the Pārāyanavagga. Hopefully, we can convey something of the sense of the passages, something of the role that it has within Buddhism. But also to me, it's something I really love. And so I'm trying to hopefully convey something of my love and my devotion for these these suttas. Because I think I think these are really precious, precious moments that have been passed down to us. And I still find that I come back to these after so many years and find so much that's valuable and worthwhile in them. So hopefully this has been something that's been interesting and uplifting for you all. I wish you the best and I look forward to speaking with you again next week.